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SUBJECT: DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF VIETNAM PRESSES; GVN RESPONDS CAREFULLY

REF: A. HCMC 607 AND PREVIOUS

[1B](#). HANOI 1389 AND PREVIOUS

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[11](#). (SBU) Summary: Political activist and senior member of the nascent Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV) Tran Khue faces official harassment as he presses his party's agenda. HCMC authorities restricted Khue's movement and briefly detained him on July 15, 16 and 18, when he was questioned about the DPV's activities. We raised the harassment with HCMC officials, who complained that Khue is exploiting popular frustration over land compensation to score points for the DPV. Khue expects pressure to mount following the conclusion of the APEC leaders meeting and Vietnam's WTO accession, but the DPV will continue to press forward with its strategy, including plans to contest the 2007 National Assembly elections. Khue supports PNTR and Vietnam's WTO aspirations, believing that Vietnam's international integration will accelerate the process of reform and ultimately end one-party rule. End Summary.

Khue Temporarily Detained

[12](#). (SBU) On July 15, political activist Tran Khue notified us that the police had intercepted him at Tan Son Nhat airport the previous day as he tried to travel to Hanoi to meet with fellow dissident Hoang Minh Chinh. Khue had planned to discuss the registration of the Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV) and the opening of a DPV office in HCMC (reflets). He was taken to a local police station where he was told he had violated regulations on "temporary absence from residence" when he went to Hanoi in May. He was also questioned about the DPV's charter, his intention to set up an office in HCMC and whether he had accepted Hoang Minh Chinh's offer to become Deputy Secretary General of the DPV. (Khue's appointment to the Deputy

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Secretary position was confirmed publicly on July 21.) Khue was

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again summoned on July 16, and was questioned about his interviews on Radio Free Asia (RFA) and with other international media outlets. Khue told us that he had protested the questioning and informed the police that he would not cooperate with them on these issues in the future. Khue noted that police had increased surveillance on him.

[13](#). (SBU) On July 18, Khue contacted us again to report that, at 5:30 that morning, police had prevented him from leaving HCMC. This time, Khue intended to travel by bus to neighboring Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province for a family gathering. He was questioned about his interviews with RFA, the status of the DPV and his exchanges with Hoang Minh Chinh. He was released after five hours, but was told that he would not be allowed to travel

outside HCMC until he answered police questions.

¶4. (SBU) On the morning of July 18, we also received two phone calls from unidentified "concerned citizens" reporting that a group of approximately 12 Vietnamese had gathered outside of an HCMC government office to protest Khue's detention. In a subsequent phone conversation, Khue confirmed that a protest had taken place, but said it was focused on land rights issues. He added that he had been working with "numerous" people to help them file complaints about land expropriation and financial compensation. In another phone conversation, on July 20, Khue noted that he had received an invitation to attend a conference in Switzerland, but would not be able to attend because of travel restrictions and the failure of GVN authorities to issue him a passport. Khue said that police had stopped asking him to attend "working sessions" because they were "fed up with him." Authorities also had not disconnected his Internet ADSL connection, which was installed in his home in June.

Official Response

¶5. (SBU) On July 21, Acting CG met with ERO Deputy Director Le Hung Quoc to discuss Khue's situation. The Acting CG raised our concern over restrictions on Khue's freedom of movement and his detentions, noting that they come at a particularly sensitive time, with Vietnam's Permanent Normal Trading Relations (PNTR) status being considered in Congress. Quoc stated that the matter was an internal Vietnamese affair, but that because the GVN values "direct and open exchange with the United States," he was willing to provide a response. Khue's situation was a "simple technical matter" related to the Vietnamese residency regulations that require citizens to register temporary absence from their residences. This regulation is implemented more frequently in some areas more than others, Quoc added. In Khue's case, the activist had failed to register his absence during his last trip to Hanoi and he had refused to cooperate with police about the matter.

¶6. (SBU) Noting that "83 million Vietnamese matter more than a few people," Quoc then proceeded to underscore the difficulty the HCMC government and other jurisdictions face in compensating people for expropriated land needed for development. For

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example, if the HCMC government were to compensate fully citizens for a modest road-widening project, it would eat up nearly three-quarters of the entire development budget. He complained that Khue is exploiting this problem to solicit people to give him land complaints, which he then files with the Government to boost his credibility.

Khue Says He Will Press Ahead

¶7. (SBU) On July 25, we met with Khue and a DPV colleague, lawyer Bui Kim Thanh, in a caf, in HCMC. In contrast to our experience in previous meetings, there was a heavy plainclothes police presence in the caf, and the general vicinity. Thanh told us that she has been an advocate for the poor and the dispossessed ever since graduating from law school in 2004. She has facilitated contact between citizens with land and compensation grievances and Tran Khue. Thus far in 2006, Khue has filed over 50 complaints for groups of individuals from HCMC and throughout the Mekong Delta. Police monitor the contacts and sometimes pressure individuals to dissociate themselves from Khue, but thus far have not prevented these individuals from meeting him. Khue tells the petitioners that the DPV is "not responsible for the outcome," but will file their cases with the Southern Office of the GVN in HCMC. He tells the petitioners that if the GVN fails to settle adequately, the DPV then will bring the cases to the attention of the international community.

Thanh said that, following Khue's detention last week, some of the petitioners wished to protest for his release, but Thanh counseled them to sit tight.

¶8. (SBU) Khue said that he still plans to travel to Hanoi soon to meet with DPV General Secretary Hoang Minh Chinh to discuss party strategy. He can communicate with Chinh indirectly via other DPV colleagues in Hanoi who have Internet connections. He plans to recommend that the DPV contest the 2007 National Assembly elections; the DPV could field up to 100 candidates. He also continues to plan to open a DPV office in HCMC, but is "having difficulty" renting a facility.

¶9. (SBU) Khue and Thanh requested that President Bush highlight human rights concerns during his scheduled November visit to Vietnam. He urged the President to meet with "regular Vietnamese" and dissidents as well as with Government officials during the visit.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) Khue and the DPV seek to take advantage of the GVN's inability to handle emotional property claims transparently and effectively in order to expand the DPV's limited pull among Vietnamese. Khue similarly sought to exploit labor unrest in the HCMC area in early 2006. He calculates that the GVN's hands are tied -- at least to some extent -- because of the PNTR debate in Congress, Vietnam's pending WTO accession and the President's visit. (The fact that Khue was never held overnight and continues to be allowed to receive and submit petitions on behalf of other Vietnamese suggests that the GVN is keenly aware of its exposure to the international spotlight. Khue would have been treated more harshly for lesser "sins" only a few years back.) Khue fully expects pressure to mount following the conclusion of the APEC leaders meeting and Vietnam's accession to the WTO. Nonetheless, he supports PNTR and Vietnam's WTO accession, believing that Vietnam's international integration will accelerate the process of reform and ultimately end one-party rule. End Comment.

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